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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0902 01/12/07

~ Digital Home Is Touted ~ People Are Talking! ~ New Office for Mac!
~ Hack This Application! ~ Mozilla Tweaks Firefox ~ SainT 2.0 Released!

~ PayPal Protects More! ~ HP: Touch-Screen Vista ~ Net Neutrality Bill
~ New Search for Boomers ~ MySpace Goes To France ~ CPS Electronics News!

-* Minter Talks Space Giraffe! *-
-* Apple Drops 'Computer' From Its Name *-
-* Grants Offered To Help Shape The Internet! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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On a personal note, it's been on helluva bad week. A lot of family issues going on, but I won't go into details. For a new year, it's not starting out in a manner that I would consider good. Well, whaddaya gonna do...?

The weather hasn't been too badly these past few days, but it has gone from one extreme to another temperature-wise. At least as far as the climate goes, it appears that winter is here to stay. We had a great run!

I don't have much to say this week - at least anything relevant. So, let's move forward and get to this week's issue!

Until next time...

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SainT 2.0 Released - Many New Features

It happened 12/21/06:

2.00
* Great speed up for video recording !
* Video recording support both 25 and 50Hz rate
* Screen is now 400*274, no more black lines at top and bottom in fullscreen (in GPU mode, enjoy fullscreen demos !)
* More pixels detail in "sound output debug" graphical view
* CPU rendering finally compatible with 16 and 32bits rendering, should run in windowed mode on more machines !
* CPU rendering enhanced, SainT should work on software DirectX machine (some laptop)
* faster and cleaner low-pass filter routine
* removed old code path for dynamic texture
* removed all old-fashioned CPU rendering modes (blend, interlace)
* fixed "msvcr71.dll" missing message.
* Again a new 68000 prefetching routine
* fixed nasty bug if any shifter write at the very end of the frame

URL: http://leonard.oxg.free.fr/SainT/saint.html

AUTHOR: BigNick0
AUTHOR URL: http://www.atari.org/

Closing of CPS Electronics

Hi all,

As the Founder of CPS Electronics I have closed the biz as of 2007. As such I am selling stuff on Ebay under http://stores.ebay.co.uk/exxos-surplus-electronics, I keep listing items so check back. There s a load of stuff not listen yet. Drop me a line if you like.

As one of the developers for PeST all information is no longer online via cps-electronics website. Remaining PeST's are currently being sold on Ebay. I have setup a website http://pest.atari.org/ Which will list sales distributors and info(when I get around to updating it).

I have setup a new website www.future-technologies.co.uk though at this time it is unknown what will be placed there. Currently you can view a about me page at http://www.future-technologies.co.uk/video/

Other files of interest are slowly being ported over to stos.atari.st website. Documents such as my 1.44 controller will all vanish of my pipex account at the end of this month. Currently I do not know where past projects will be uploaded to. I will imagine such items will be placed on the new PeST site in the future. I will try and retain as much info and pages as possible

That s all for now, happy new year to you all!

Chris

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Short column this week... partly because there aren't a lot of messages, but partly because I'm in an irritable mood.

Yeah, I know what you're thinking... "Joe? In a bad mood? NO WAY!"

Way.

It's been a tough week... again. You know the kind. The kind of week when going to work is like jumping feet-first into a wood chipper every day. Add to that the fact that the weather changes (we've gone from 72 degrees to 18 in a span of a few days) is wreaking havoc on my bones.

Everything aches.

Y’know, I don’t remember my father ever complaining about such things, and he was a damned workhorse. Remember that commercial with the guy walking on the beach or something and saying, "I spent the first half of my life trying not to follow in my dad’s footsteps. Now I’m just trying to fill his shoes."? Well, there’s a lot of truth in that.

It seems that I was a lot smarter and my father was a lot dumber when I was in my teens. Remember the feeling? Yep, them was the days. I knew everything back then. [grin]

Well, anyway, I’ve wised up some in the past... ummm... bunch of decades. Hey, at least I’m not... "Using the internets to search on the google". [evil grin]

Okay, enough. Let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Last week our buddy Tom Andrews told us:

"In truth, there’s nothing Internet-involved that I can do with the STE that I can’t do as well or better with my Linux or Windows PCs, but I hate the idea of turning the old girl completely out to pasture just yet. What’s available these days to get me back on the Internet with my STE?"

Michael Schwingen tells Tom:

"If you do have a Linux machine with net access, you might use that as a gateway: install a nullmodem cable between the Linux machine and the ST, and run a PPP or SLIP server on the Linux box, combined with IP routing or NAT.

You won’t get ethernet speed that way, but the required hardware is cheap and you need no new software."

David Wade asks Michael:

"Why can’t you do the same with a PC running XP Pro?"

Michael replies:

"You probably can - however, *I* don’t know how to, and at the time I needed this, I was running Windows 98, which did not quite have the required routing capabilities.

In my case, I needed to provide both direct UUCP and PPP to the ST - the solution was a small (<50 lines IIRC) shell script on the Unix box that listened on the serial port and provided minimal AT-command emulation. Upon receiving a ATDT command, it would look at the "dialed" number and fork the right server program - the ST would not even notice that there

was no modem connected anymore.

On Windows, I would have had to write a C program to achieve this."

David replies:

"I must learn to be more exact. You can use Windows/2000 and XP Pro as dial in servers, should you happen to have a Windows box to hand rather than a Linux box. However you may have issues getting performance out of the ST Com ports. I am not familiar with the Mega STE but you might be OK if it has an has an Apple type serial port (are these called LAN) as these will run faster.

However I am pretty sure the EtherNat is way faster and can go into a router no bother."

'Jimmie' asks about a modem for his new Mega:

"Being new to the mega 2, how much modem can I put on this machine? Will it take a 56k? Any help would be appreciated. By the way, anyone happen to have an owner s manual for this machine?"

Rob Mahlert tells Jimmie:

"I use to have a 56k connected to my Mega STE4 with HS modem (and then a TT030). I usually got 48k speed with them on my old isp.

If you have high speed (DSL/Cable) on a pc at home now, you might want to wait and get an Ethernet adapter.

http://hardware.atari.org/netusbee/netus.htm "

Jean-François Lemaire adds:

"I had a MegaST 4 connected with a 33k modem, I don't see why a 56 wouldn t work. It should be faster :-) The only thing to take in consideration is that to achieve maximum speed, you'll need Hsmodem to speed the serial ports up."

Jimmie asks for clarification:

"HS modem... is that software?"

Jean-François explains:

"Yes. High Speed modem. An AUTO folder program that replaces the serial routines from TOS. Without it, you're stuck at 19k or some such. You will find it at any Atari FTP server. I think it comes with a new serial configuration CPX so you would also need Xcontrol. But I may be mistaken. It's been years."

Ronald Hall adds:

"Unless things have changed, he won’t be able to get higher speeds without changing some things:

1. Faster CPU
2. Hardware mod to the serial port
3. and HSModem

I’d be happy if I’m wrong about this though!"

Jean-Francois replies:

"Mm. You’re probably right. I must have been mixing up with the TT030. Sorry about that. Boy! 19200 bps. Was it _that_ slow?"

Ronald tells Jean-Francois:

"Yep, sure was, although it seemed like warp 9 back in those days."

Jimmie now asks about game cartridges for the ST:

"I note that game carts can be used with the mega 2? Which carts can be used?"

Greg Goodwin tells Jimmie:

"Haven’t found many carts for the ST except...

Spectre GCR (Mac Emulator)
VT100 Terminal emulation cart
Various clock and calendar carts

Well not many. The carts only held 128K and while that would be awesome in the Atari 8 bit world, that wouldn’t hold ST Star Raiders. Trust me, I would like to make a ST Star Raiders cart. But the Atari ST cart port is a GREAT way to get information into the ST very quickly. So in summary, bad as a game cart medium, good for a transfer pathway."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - From Video Games To Employment?
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Minter Talks Space Giraffe!
                                     Wii Tops PS3 In December!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Nintendo Wii Tops Sony's PlayStation 3 In December

Nintendo Co. Ltd. sold 604,200 of its new Wii video game consoles in the United States in December, beating Sony Corp., which sold 490,700 units of its new PlayStation 3, according to retail market research firm NPD.

Microsoft Corp. sold 1.1 million Xbox 360 video game consoles to consumers in December. Microsoft's console debuted in November 2005, a full year ahead of the Wii and PS3, which were in short supply during the holidays, when the U.S. video game industry rings up about half of its annual sales.

Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo are locked in a battle for the top spot in the $30 billion industry's new console war.

Overall video game and hardware sales were $3.7 billion in December, up 28 percent. Overall sales rose 19 percent in 2006 to $12.5 billion, NPD said. Game sales, not including titles for personal computers, were up 5.4 percent to $1.7 billion and hardware jumped 59.2 percent to $1.6 billion, fueled by sales of consoles like the high-end PS3 and Xbox 360, which retail for $600 and $400, respectively, in the United States.

NPD receives data representing about two-thirds of U.S. retail sales and makes projections for the remainder of the market based on a sampling of consumers. The figures do not include Canadian sales or those to "mom and pop" retailers, and are among the numerous data points used by analysts to measure the health of the video game market.

"Our numbers in terms of what we have shipped is definitely well above that (NPD) number. What NPD does not account for is the product that is in transit," said Nintendo spokeswoman Perrin Kaplan, who added that the company had a "robust" year.

Sony spokesman Dave Karraker said the company had a record month in December, when according to NPD it rang up total U.S. sales of $1.6 billion.

David Hufford, director of project management for Xbox, said the NPD numbers - which also showed Xbox 360 life-to-date U.S. sales of 4.5 million - "are very much in line with what we're seeing here."

Microsoft on Sunday said it had shipped 10.4 million Xbox 360 units worldwide by the end of 2006.

The company had the top-selling game with "Gears of War" for the Xbox 360. Unit sales of the gory shooting game reached 815,700 in December and should top 3 million in total by next week, Hufford told Reuters.

Activision Inc.'s "Guitar Hero II" for the Sony's market-leading PlayStation 2 was the second-biggest seller in December, with unit sales

of 805,200.

Electronic Arts Inc.’s "Madden NFL 07," also for the PS2, landed in third place, selling 737,100 copies.

Sony sold 1.4 million units of the PS2, the current leader in the global console market.

Hand-held players were also hot holiday gifts, with consumers snapping up 1.6 million Nintendo DS units and 953,200 PlayStation Portables, NPD said.

Minter Talks Space Giraffe

More details have emerged of Jeff Minter’s XBLA game, Space Giraffe.

So far, work on the engine has finished and fundamental gameplay mechanics are in and doing what they should. The next few weeks will see levels fleshed out (over 100, apparently), the difficulty curve assessed, new enemy types added and display graphics tweaked. Minter also expects the game to begin resembling an Xbox Live Arcade title, adding high-scores and achievements to the package.

On his LiveJournal, below the picture of him hugging a sheep, Jeff is confident of the game’s progress, reckoning it’s fast approaching the first testing phase.

"Looking forward now over the next few weeks to actually shaping this into an actual game with a beginning, an end, lives, hi-scores, achievements and such - something I can actually ship out to guinea pigs to play and get coherent feedback about."

Space Giraffe is a psychedelic shooter which follows on from popular Atari Jaguar title Tempest 2000. It will cost you about 400 Microsoft points and is expected to launch sometime this year.

Give A Child A Video Game - And Maybe A Job

Mathematics, science and video games? A U.S. university professor is urging schools to consider using video games as tools to better prepare children for
the work force.

For although many educators scoff at the idea of video games in schools, the U.S. military has titles that train soldiers, teenagers with cancer use a game to battle their illness virtually and physically and some surgeons use video games to keep their hands nimble.

David Williamson Shaffer, an education science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says schools should use games to prepare children to compete in the work force, where juggling technology is a daily requirement.

"People think that the way we teach kids in schools is the natural way we should learn," said Shaffer, author of the book "How Computer Games Help Children Learn."

"But young people in the United States today are being prepared for standardized jobs in a world that will, very soon, punish those who can't innovate. We simply can't 'skill and drill' our way to innovation."

Shaffer argues that youngsters heading into the work force will, from day one, have to compete with skilled workers from around the world with years of technological experience.

For this reason, children should be given the chance to use their innate skills of simultaneously listening to music while playing games, watching videos, surfing the Web and messaging friends from computers or cell phones, while learning about things like biology, history or physics.

He said the current educational system was designed in the late 1800s to prepare people for life in industrial America not today's technologically-steeped world.

Shaffer said this new approach might also help the United States compete against fast-developing countries like India and China which are turning out engineers and scientists at a faster rate.

Governments in Britain and Singapore have already backed efforts that use video games and other technology to develop new teaching methods.

Proponents of such efforts say video games engage kids in a way that is relevant to their lives, allowing them to learn by doing as they experiment with new social and cultural worlds.

Like the U.S. military, some large U.S. corporations have already adapted and use video games to train workers.

Shaffer and his team have developed a range of games that help students learn to think like engineers, urban planners, journalists, architects and other professionals. A list of their games is at http://www.epistemicgames.com/eg/?cat=5.

In March, Shaffer and his team will start working with a school in Madison, Wisconsin, and later this year with a Chicago school.

"There are bad games out there, just as there are bad books. So adults who care about what children learn have to educate themselves about games - and, more important, start to think about learning in new ways for the digital age of global competition," he said.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Gates Touts Digital Home

Microsoft’s Chairman Bill Gates is kicking off the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) here this evening by unveiling products Microsoft hopes will encourage more widespread adoption of the digital or "connected" home.

Microsoft has been promoting the idea of a connected home, where multiple devices can access and share multimedia content stored on a PC or a central server hub, for some time, but so far only the most savvy or wealthy technology enthusiasts have realized even a piece of that vision. But Gates and Robbie Bach, the president of Microsoft’s Entertainment and Devices Division, also scheduled to appear at Sunday’s keynote, aim to show how Microsoft can help more people can get access to the technology.

Gates is announcing that service providers such as AT&T that offer Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) using Microsoft’s software will begin offering this year on the Xbox 360 console in lieu of a set-top box. Service providers still will give users the option of the typical set-top box for IPTV or an Xbox 360, said Microsoft spokesman Eric Hollreiser.

Still, the announcement sets up a scenario where home users can watch television and surf the Internet through their Xbox 360 console, which also is an IP-connected device. The move shows Microsoft upping the ante to provide not just software, but also hardware for the digital home, which could eventually put it in competition with its own hardware partners.

As expected, Windows Vista, which will have its widespread consumer release on January 30, is also a major focus of Gates’ speech. He is expected to unveil new deals that will deliver more media content through Vista’s Media Center capabilities. Windows Media Center, which used to be its own operating system but is now part of Vista, allows users to serve up content stored on their PC on televisions, or use their PC or another device to set content for their TVs.

Deals with NASCAR, Fox Sports, Nickelodeon, Showtime, and Bongo will deliver specialized content through Windows Media Center. All of the content except Bongo’s will be free; users will have to pay a subscription for Bongo content. Microsoft also will allow users to submit video content they have created to Media center by integrating it with Soapbox, Microsoft’s YouTube-like user-generated video upload service.

The debut of Windows Home Server, a product Microsoft has mentioned before under the code-name "Quattro," is also aimed at helping consumers establish a more connected home. Windows Home Server will not be sold directly to consumers, but will be used by vendors such as Hewlett-Packard as the basis for new hardware that consumers can put in their homes to connect their Windows Vista computers, Hollreiser said.

Users with a broadband connection and more than one computer or device that has an Internet connection can access data stored on Windows Home Server. It also will provide data security and automatically back up data every night.

Windows Home Server is aimed at providing a centralized server hub for multimedia files in the digital home, Hollreiser said. It will come in both Windows Vista and Windows XP versions, and pricing and specifications will vary according to the manufacturer. The first hardware using Windows Home Server software should be available sometime this year.

Gates is also showing off some new hardware from Microsoft partners that

use new Vista features. HP’s TouchSmart PC, for instance, will take advantage of touchscreen capabilities in Vista, while the Toshiba Portege R400 laptop will include a display screen on the top of the laptop that uses Vista’s Sideshow technology to show users content such as their Outlook schedule without having to open or turn on their PC. Gates also will show off a new ultramobile PC from Medion, as well as a new Sony Vaio optimized for Media Center.

For up-to-the minute blogs, stories, photos, and video from the nation’s largest consumer electronics show, visit PC World’s CES 2007 Live Coverage Infocenter.

Grants Offered To Help Shape Internet

All-expense-paid trips are being offered to help ensure that technologists in developing countries have a say in shaping the Internet’s architecture for years to come.

Technical standards before the Internet Engineering Task Force govern e-mail formatting, foreign-language character sets and other Internet basics to ensure that people around the world can communicate with one another through their Internet-connected computers.

Standards can make or break companies, an African business, for instance, might suddenly find its products shunned should they suddenly be incompatible with offerings from industrialized nations. Lack of progress has affected the ability for instant-messaging programs to talk with one another and for Web addresses to use non-English characters.

But because Americans and Europeans got to the Internet first, engineers elsewhere have complained they haven’t had enough say in some of the Internet’s fundamental decisions.

To encourage greater participation from developing countries, where Internet usage is growing, the nonprofit Internet Society is offering grants for up to five people to attend each Internet Engineering Task Force meeting. Covered expenses include meeting registration, airfare and hotels.

Each recipient will also be paired with an IETF veteran to serve as a mentor. "There are many talented individuals in developing regions that have an interest in and follow the IETF’s work and would benefit from the opportunity to participate in person," Lynn St. Amour, the Internet Society’s chief executive, said in a statement.

The next IETF meetings are scheduled for March in Prague, the Czech Republic, and for July in Chicago. Applications for both are due Feb. 2.

The Internet Society is paying for the program through corporate sponsorships, the initial money coming from Internet search company Google Inc.

Internet Freedom Not Part of UN Telecoms Agency’s Scope

The new head of the UN's International Telecommunication Union, Hamadoun Toure, said that the agency had no business dealing with freedom of expression on the Internet.

Asked about controls on the Internet and repression of dissidents who use the web in countries like China, Toure said: "Freedom of expression is a question of content which exceeds the mandate of the ITU, and to which I cannot respond."

Toure, who was elected secretary general of the 191-nation ITU in November 2006, said the agency's priority was to ensure the proper functioning of the communications infrastructure between countries, and of common technical standards.

During the UN's World Summit on the Information Society in 2005, which was organised by the ITU, the 176 countries attending the event adopted a formal declaration underlining the need to respect freedom of expression in new technologies such as the Internet.

The then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, called on participants to step up their efforts to guarantee freedom of expression and information.

Toure said he opposed attempts to replace the US private body managing global website allocation, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), with a new international body.

The new ITU chief said it would be difficult and too controversial to implement a new oversight body and underlined that the UN agency could not supervise the Internet on its own.

Toure argued for better cooperation between organizations like ICANN and the ITU.

HP Offers Touch-Screen Vista on New PCs

HP reached for the consumer market Monday with two new PCs that allow customers to control Microsoft's Windows Vista OS with a touch-screen interface instead of a mouse.

The TouchSmart IQ770 PC is a desktop computer with a 19-inch screen intended for the tech-savvy mom, while the Pavilion tx1000, with a 12.1-inch screen, is an entertainment-focused notebook for students.

While HP has made tablet PCs and handheld iPaq devices before, the company has never used touch screens in desktop or notebook PCs, said Kevin Wentzel, technical marketing manager for HP's mobility global business unit, at the CES trade show in Las Vegas. A finger touch has no effect on most tablet PCs, since their screens use digitized panels that react only to an active stylus.

Users of handhelds and PDAs will find the Pavilion tx1000's touch-screen interface familiar, Wentzel said. HP built the notebook with a hinged screen, so the display rotates to face away from the keyboard for a sleek movie-playing appearance, and it folds completely over the keyboard to become a tablet PC.

To accommodate media-hungry users, the notebook comes with 1GB of RAM and

uses a dual-core Turion 64 X2 processor from AMD, Wentzel said. One downside of running Vista on a notebook is the high battery power required to support the necessary graphics card, memory, and processor. The tx1000 can play DVDs for 2.5 hours on a single battery charge, he said.

Future versions of the product will include an integrated wireless WAN card, as well as a Sling Media player that allows users to reach content remotely through a Slingbox device in their home.

The TouchSmart desktop PC takes the touch-screen experience even further by running HP's SmartCenter software as the primary interface for Windows Vista. With large icons, an integrated TV tuner, and shortcuts to other media, the PC is built to be the hub of a range of family activities, according to Garret Gargan, North American product marketing manager for PCs.

Users can write virtual sticky notes for other family members and then touch and drag the notes onto an on-screen calendar or bulletin board. Likewise, photographers can crop or rotate pictures by manipulating them on screen. The large monitor completely obscures the computer and optional printer built behind it. Like the notebook, the desktop uses AMD's Turion 64 X2 processor.

HP will begin selling the Pavilion tx1000 on February 28 through its online store for $1299, and will sell the TouchSmart PC by the end of January for $1799. The company also plans to launch the desktop in the UK by February, and then roll it out to other countries throughout 2007.

New Office for Mac Coming

Office for Mac users who've been wondering about a new version - and Office 2007 compatibility - got some answers today as Microsoft said it will ship Office for Mac 2008 by year's end.

At MacWorld in San Francisco, officials of Microsoft's Macintosh Business Unit also announced plans for spring delivery of beta versions of converters that will allow the current version of the popular suite, Office for Mac 2004, to open, edit, and save files in Office 2007's new default XML formats for Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. The final converters will appear six to eight weeks after Office for Mac 2008 ships, Microsoft says.

Office for Mac 2008 will appear in the second half of this year and will be fully compatible with both Intel- and PowerPC-based Macs, said Geoff Price, product unit manager for Microsoft's Mac Business Unit.

The new version doesn't duplicate Office 2007's interface overhaul. Price said Office for Mac has historically followed Mac design conventions - for example, it uses palettes to do some of the work the new ribbon interface does in Office 2007.

But Price added that, like their Windows counterparts, Office for Mac designers did seek to make the suite's existing features more accessible. To that end, Office for the Mac 2008 introduces an Elements Gallery - basically a slim taskbar with several entries that runs beneath the basic toolbar in the current interface.

Clicking on an entry produces a drop-down bar of visual options. For example, an entry for a new feature called Document Parts produces thumbnails of a template-like title page, table of contents, and so on. Price says they differ from templates in that are not static documents; rather, they incorporate themes and styles.

Some of the entries in the Elements Gallery are specific to the application; others appear in several of the suite's apps, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Entourage. For example, SmartArt Graphics - which are fully compatible with the concept-expressing graphic elements in Office 2007 - appear in several Elements Galleries. In fact, Office for Mac 2008 shares the Office Art 2.0 graphics engine introduced in Office 2007.

Price also mentioned some innovations that pertain to specific Mac apps. My Day, for example, is a stand-alone applet that provides easy and quick access to the day's appointments and to-do list without requiring that you launch Entourage, which is Office for Mac's answer to Outlook in the Windows versions of Office. Excel, meanwhile, comes with Ledger Sheets, which are preconfigured worksheets for common and simple financial calculations.

The new Publishing Layout View provides easy access to desktop publishing tools to help users create common business-oriented publications such as brochures and newsletters.

Mozilla Tweaks Firefox 3.0 Feature Set

Mozilla Corp. continues to fine-tune the feature set for the next major update to its Firefox browser, due in the second half of 2007, and on Wednesday posted an updated plan.

The Firefox 3 wiki, a list of the planned changes and additions to the next upgrade of the open-source browser, now sports designations that mark features as either "functional" or "non-functional." The latter, although strictly not optional, are more intangible goals, such as "improve usability of Add-On Manager" or "simpler print preview dialog." The former, however, are more concrete, and include to-dos like "support Microsoft CardSpace" and "improve search, retrieval, and startup performance."

Among the features currently pegged as must-haves by Mozilla for Firefox 3 are an overhaul of the browser's bookmark system and new identity management tools.

Mozilla released an early preview of Firefox 3.0, dubbed "Gran Paradiso Alpha 1," last month.

When the previous update to Firefox 2.0 was launched in October, Mozilla said it would roll out a major enhancement about once a year. According to the Firefox 3.0 release plan, however, the company may also consider incremental updates - Firefox 2.5, for instance - that act as extension packs to the standard browser.

Microsoft also has promised that it will update its Internet Explorer browser every 18 to 24 months, a much shorter cycle than the 50 months between IE 6 and IE 7.

PayPal Expands Protection Coverage for eBay Customers

U.S.-based Web auction company eBay and PayPal said they expanded their buyer protection program and will now give buyers up to $2,000 of coverage for qualified transactions on eBay.com.

The PayPal buyer protection program covers qualified transactions on eBay for non-delivery of items, and for the delivery of items that are significantly not as described, the companies said in a statement.

EBay will no longer offer purchase protection for non-PayPal transactions, the companies added. (Reporting by Anant Vijay Kala in Bangalore)

MySpace Launches French Version

The popular social-networking hangout MySpace.com will officially launch a French version Thursday as it seeks traction in a crowded European market.

The new site - fr.myspace.com - will face competition from established French sites like Skyblog.com, which counts some 6.6 million users, and newer, U.S.-based networking sites that are seeking to expand their horizons.

MySpace, owned by News Corp., has secured advertising deals with a host of French businesses, including national rail network SNCF, French bank BNP Paribas SA and Vivendi SA’s telecom branch SFR.

The site already dominates in Britain and Ireland, beating out Bebo.com, locally grown Friends Reunited and MySpace’s U.S. rival Facebook.com, according to data from ComScore World Metrix.

Across Europe, MySpace saw the number of unique visitors grow six-fold over the past year. Only Facebook has grown faster, but largely because it started small, beginning 2006 with less than 3 percent of MySpace’s visitors.

MySpace is in beta testing in Germany, and an Italian version of the site was launched last December. The Los Angeles-based company also is expanding elsewhere, with News Corp. and Japan’s Softbank Corp. forming a joint venture, for instance, to bring the service to that country.

Apple Drops ’Computer’ From Name

Formerly Apple Computer, the name change reflects the company’s newfound emphasis on consumer electronics. Jobs revealed the change following announcements on the new Apple TV and iPhone, with no new Mac configurations announced whatsoever.

Senate Renews Network Neutrality Debate

In what could turn out to be a significant development in the hotly contested debate over network neutrality, Congress began drafting new legislation this week to prevent broadband providers from charging content providers for priority access.

The network neutrality legislation, introduced on Tuesday, is being spearheaded by senior lawmakers, including Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND) and Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R-Me.).

"The success of the Internet has been its openness and the ability of anyone anywhere in this country to go on the Internet and reach the world," Dorgan was quoted in news reports as saying. "If the big interests who control the pipes become gatekeepers who erect tolls, it will have a significant impact on the Internet as we know it."

The two senators have called upon other legislators to help keep the Internet free of such gatekeepers. Dorgan and Snowe argue that if the legislation is not passed, these gatekeepers might put an end to Internet innovation and even damage freedom of speech.

Known as the Internet Freedom Preservation Act, the bill would require network operators (such as Verizon or AT&T) to run their networks in a nondiscriminatory manner, preventing certain types of traffic or traffic from certain sources (such as Yahoo, Google, or Amazon) from being prioritized or deprioritized.

The bill also would require network operators to offer broadband access without requiring the purchase of other services.

"The American public has an overwhelming interest in seeing this bill pass into law, ensuring that the online marketplace of ideas remains open and vibrant," said Ben Scott, policy director of the Free Press, a nonpartisan group working to increase public participation in policy debates.

Similar legislation generated much controversy last year. The new proposal, which faces significant political impediments, is not expected to be adopted quickly.

The ongoing struggle over network neutrality has been, for the most part, a fight over competing business models. Content providers, such as Google and Yahoo, do not want to pay additional fees to allow their users priority access to their sites and services.

However, telephone and cable companies say that efforts to limit their ability to charge for faster service, for one thing, would discourage the upgrading of networks, thereby harming consumers in the end.

These companies have argued that the government should focus on expanding broadband deployment to reach more Internet users rather than trying to solve a problem that doesn’t exist.

New Search Engine For Aging Boomers

Does surfing the Web exhaust - and even exasperate - older people? The backers of Cranky.com are betting on it.

Cranky is a specialty search engine designed to please aging baby boomers by processing every request from the perspective of someone who is at least 50 years old.

This steadily growing demographic often feels overwhelmed using high-powered search engines from the likes of Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc. because they spew out more results than older eyes care to see, said Jeff Taylor, the Cranky mastermind who previously struck it rich as the founder of online employment site Monster.com.

"Our research found that people 50 and over are confused about searching on the Web," said Taylor, who runs Eons, a Boston-based startup devoted to creating products aimed at the graying baby-boom generation born from 1946 through 1964.

"It’s hard for them to understand all the results."

Launched earlier this week, Cranky is trying to simplify things by showing just four Web sites in the non-advertising section of each results page and making the sparser listings more relevant to its target audience. Google and Yahoo, by comparison, usually list at least 10 sites per results page.

Like the mainstream search engines, Cranky hopes to make money selling targeted advertising alongside its search results. Cranky’s ads will be provided by InterActiveCorp’s Ask.com, a search engine that has been around for a decade.

After teaming up with Internet research firm Compete Inc. to identify the 500,000 most popular Web sites among people at least 45 years old, Cranky dispatched reviewers to dig even deeper into the top 5,000 destinations. The reviewers then wrote descriptions about the content and tried to ensure the index contained more direct links to the most meaningful information.

At 46, Taylor technically isn’t old enough to be using Cranky.com yet.

But he could have easily retired by now. When he left Monster in August 2005, Taylor had already made at least $33 million cashing in his stock options in the site’s parent company, Monster Worldwide Inc.

Taylor isn’t expecting Cranky to be an overnight success.

"By the time I get it right," he said, "I probably will be 50."

Do-it-Yourself Phishing Kit Found Online

A software kit has been discovered for sale on the Internet that makes it possible for non-experts to set up and carry out sophisticated phishing attacks on large numbers of websites.

EMC’s RSA division reports that its Anti-Fraud Detection Center (AFCC) found the ’universal man-in-the-middle phishing kit’ being offered in a free demonstration version on a criminal forum monitored by the company.

The kit - said to have a user-friendly interface designed to help the nontechnical criminal - automates the programming needed to pull off a normally tricky man-in the middle attack on websites such as banks or e-commerce sites.

Typically, the attack generated by the kit would start by duping users into clicking on a link embedded within a phishing email. This would direct them to a fraudulent URL able to communicate with the genuine website in real time, retrieving content from that site to make the scam appear as convincing as possible.

Apart from the fact such attacks can be carried out quickly and simply on multiple websites, it offers the advantage of giving criminals access to all information exchanged with the attacked site, not just the basic login.

According to RSA, the kit qualifies as ’universal’ because it can be used on any website, and thus attacks don’t need to be tailored for each site.

"As institutions put additional online security measures in place, inevitably the fraudsters are looking at new ways of duping innocent victims and stealing their information and assets," said Marc Gaffan of RSA.

"While these types of attacks are still considered ’next generation,’ we expect them to become more widespread over the course of the next 12-18 months," he said.

Working man-in-the-middle attacks are relatively rare but not unheard of by any means. Last year, the Sinowal Trojan was found circulating in Germany by Kaspersky Lab.

Hack This Application!

Vendors can build a buzz around products by embracing the hacker community, according to technology company executives speaking at the International Consumer Electronics Show.

Vendors often offer development tools to allow professional users and third-party developers to customize business-productivity products. In the consumer electronics market, however, vendors tend to resist the idea of allowing customers to tamper with their products, noted vendors speaking at the show, which ended Thursday in Las Vegas.

But there are benefits to opening up consumer products to hackers and hobbyists.

One example is TiVo, founded in 1997 to develop digital video technology that allows users to record TV shows.

TiVo, based on Linux, is an extensible platform, and from its early days, the company welcomed hackers and professional developers.

"When we first came out, no one knew what DVR was," said Richard Bullwinkle, vice president of products at entertainment networking company Mediabolic and formerly a senior member of TiVo’s product marketing team.

"So we made it hacker friendly."

Hackers formed an early adopter community that helped promote the product, he said.

"We had forums where you could go in and see what was happening," Bullwinkle said.

Microsoft, which entered the game market late with the Xbox and faced formidable competition from companies like Sony, came out with a gaming software architecture that is extensible.

XNA is a set of tools designed to allow people to create their own games, said Jim Baldwin, product unit manager for the IPTV (Internet Protocol TV) program within the Microsoft TV division. Though some tools are meant for professionals, XNA Game Studio Express is also targeted at students and hobbyists.

"The idea was to embrace the gaming community and give them the ability to make their own games; it's a good way to bring people into the business of building games," Baldwin said.

There are legitimate business reasons, however, for companies to resist having users alter products, the panelists acknowledged.

"If you make something too easy to hack, people will call you when they break things," Baldwin said. Then the vendor loses money when the help desk assists users in sorting though problems, he noted.

"You have to achieve a balance; it's hard to know where to set the dial," Bullwinkle said.

Sony has been too strict about preventing users from playing around with hacks into products like the PlayStation Portable, Bullwinkle and other panelists agreed. While Sony had a huge hit in the 1980s with the Sony Walkman portable CD player, it is behind in the music player arena now, and Microsoft has caught up to the company in the game market, they noted.

The music industry also has been too strict about DRM (digital rights management) copy controls, the vendors said. Consumers are confused and angry about not being able to play songs acquired from one vendor on other vendors' devices, they said.

"If they made things easy to use, they might make a lot more money on it," Bullwinkle said.

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